

***Martin Bucer, der dritte deutsche Reformator. Zum Ertrag der Edition der Deutschen Schriften Martin Bucers***, edited by Christoph Strohm and Thomas Wilhelmi, Akademie-Konferenzen, 26, Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2016, 106 pp., 3 ill., €28 (paperback), ISBN 978-3-8253-6723-7. Also available as E-book, ISBN 978-3-8253-7694-9

The chief purpose of this attractively produced, relatively small book is to draw attention to an important landmark in the history of research on the Strasbourg- and latterly Cambridge-based Reformer, Martin Bucer. Even if his status has not always been either well perceived or appreciated in some quarters, most people now would not contest Bucer's place among the six main and most influential early Reformers along with Luther, Zwingli, Melancthon, Bullinger and Calvin. Bucer's extraordinarily tireless energy and irrepressible engagement with most of the turbulent religious and ecclesio-political problems of the day in church and society, locally, regionally, and internationally, is reflected in a prolific literary output in Latin and German. If one includes his correspondence (of which only a few thousand items have survived) along with his extensive, manuscript memoranda, reports, drafts etc., such productivity is staggering and intimidating – bearing in mind that Bucer was rarely a person of few words on any topic. He was no master of Humanist literary style in most instances – but this enhances somehow his authenticity and hectic *modus operandi*, if not always his accessibility.

The occasion, then, of this booklet was to celebrate the completion km 2015/16 of the 19-volume modern edition of Bucer's writings in German, *Martin Bucers Deutsche Schriften* (although some of the volumes do occasionally include some Latin material for various good reasons). Also, as is made clear in the chapter in this book by Stephen Buckwalter on Bucer's theological profile, number of physical volumes is greater than nineteen, since several volumes were published in two or three parts. On the entire project and the impressive resources it supplies, see <https://www.haw.uni-heidelberg.de/forschung/forschungsstellen/bucer.de.html>. Volume 18 (a treasure trove of nearly 800 pages!) appeared in 2015, followed by a volume of comprehensive indices in 2016. Subsequently, a valedictory day-conference took place at Heidelberg in acknowledgement of the achievement – but without great fanfare. The low-key event was suitable, since Bucer does not have the same popular fan base or church patronage which some other Reformers have had.

The five essays in this volume derive from that gathering and were published in the same year. A piece by Christoph Strohm, the last general editor of the Bucer German edition, reminds us that in the difficult sphere of church reformation, it is reductionist to characterize

Bucer pre-1548 as just the ‘Strasbourg’ or ‘Alsatian’ Reformer. Rather, his area of hands-on activity extended throughout the larger region of south-west Germany – especially in imperial free cities like Ulm and Augsburg as well as the duchy of Wurttemberg. There were also other German regions where Bucer was also deeply involved, like Hessa, but the south-west is Strohm’s focus. His concern is to depict Bucer as a truly ‘German’ Reformer, not so much due to his ethnicity, it appears, as to his regular engagement as an advisor or trouble-shooter in a large and very wealthy sector of imperial and German territory well beyond the confines of Strasbourg. His contribution helped determine the influential otherness of much of the south German Reformation. Underlining this reality of Bucer as ‘the third German Reformer’ is hardly meant to detract from Bucer’s unmatched ‘European’ credentials. It is, one can deduce, directed primarily at traditional German and other international opinion which still tends to see the ‘German Reformation’ largely in terms of ‘Wittenberg,’ as most basic text books illustrate. However, as pointed out in this essay, that expression was originally used in 1961 by Heinrich Bornkamm at a time – as we will see in the article by Martin Greschat mentioned below – when there was also still a bit of an academic Franco-German tug-of-war behind the scenes over proprietary rights to the Bucer legacy.

Martin Greschat’s survey of the history of the Bucer edition has added value derived from his own associations in Münster (Westf.) with the project in the 1960s and 70s (although he only mentions himself once in passing). Greschat was able to observe, supportively and critically, both the project’s evolution and the various personalities involved with it. Another particularly good feature of his diplomatically composed piece is its use and sometimes reproduction of extant, unpublished archival material of correspondence, minutes, reports etc. relating to the genesis and development of the edition’s conception and history from about 1951 onwards. The chapter can also be profitably balanced with the cited Marc Lienhard, “Régarads sur l’édition des Oeuvres de Martin Bucer,” *Revue d’histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 92 (2012), and the uncited Stephen E. Buckwalter’s article arising out of a conference in Cambridge held on the 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Bucer’s death there: “Martin Bucer’s Deutsche Schriften: Current Work, Future Projects,” *Reformation & Renaissance Review* 3.1-2 (2001); this expressed the hope that the edition will be completed by 2020! – so that compared to the seven volumes published from 1960 to 1999, a dozen were published post-haste between 1999 and 2016.

Up to the 1950s, Bucer studies were thin on the ground. The only noteworthy contributions in the previous twenty-five years had been from Hastings Eells (above all), Jacques Courvoisier, Werner Bellardi, Henri Strohl, Robert Stupperich, Leopold Temmel and

Constantin Hopf or Hope. The need for easier access to Bucer's writings was acutely felt. He had been passed over by the Corpus Reformatorum in the previous century – ironic in view of the major role of Strasbourg scholars in much of that edition. All the names involved at the birth of the Bucer-works project were, or later became, iconic names in Reformation historiography, namely: François Wendel, Robert Stupperich, Heinrich Bornkamm, Rodolphe Peter, and Jean Rott as well as Wilhelm Maurer, Gerhard Ritter, Ernst Bizer, Henri Meylan, Ernst Staehelin, and Fritz Blanke – an uneasy French, German and peace-keeping Swiss combination in the context of the times. The hope to eventually have someone from 'England' on the 'International Bucer Commission' was never fulfilled. When one also adds the name of the advanced Bucer researcher largely outside this sodality – the Paris Dominican, Jacques-Vincent Pollet, then the mix became a bit more volatile. Greschat indicates that these names were not just interested academics, rather, many of them, as Disaster Europe survivors, were also demonstrably agitated by ethnic, cultural, linguistic, political and confessional considerations and rivalries in a challenging context – Alsace French yet again. They were also divided on the concept, aims and objectives of a new edition. [The Swiss and some of the Germans seem to have quietly walked away in due course.]

It is, then, something of a miracle that the edition of Bucer's *Opera* of Latin and German writings, and correspondence) was launched at all considering these partly inauspicious origins. Helped undoubtedly by the subsequent (West) German economic miracle, it has, however, now reached partial fruition over sixty years later with the completion of Bucer's German works after various high points and low points sketched here by Greschat. This includes the edition's providential rescue in 1995 from internal troubles and near capsizing of the edition centre in Münster by Gottfried Seebaß – director of the marvellous *Bucer Bibliography* (2005) – and the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences. The Academy now hosts free access to the entire edition digitalized at [digi.hadw-bw.de/view/bds](http://digi.hadw-bw.de/view/bds) – a remarkable boon for researchers.

The Bucer German edition has been enabled by German funding and German editors (excepting the influential Marijn de Kroon, Stephen Buckwalter and externally, Cornelis Augustijn). But because of a fateful, demarcation-decision made in the 1950s, the Latin works and the correspondence were over-optimistically put on separate tracks. Despite visions of a joint Franco-German enterprise, the *Opera latina* mostly fell in the end to voluntary work by random non-German individuals (still, six volumes up to now), although the correspondence, assembled so assiduously by Jean Rott for little reward, was eventually

taken over as a fully funded project (for the time being) in Erlangen by Berndt Hamm, Rheinhold Friedrich, and Wolfgang Simon (eight splendid volumes so far but with summaries in German and French only). Everyone understandably has bemoaned this unequally bifurcated situation – but things are actually much better than they were in 1951.

The other three chapters in this book also bring something fresh. As a long-time editor on most of the volumes, Stephen Buckwalter has an unrivalled knowledge of Bucer's German writings. Here he sketches a theological map of Bucer extracted from the last dozen volumes. The task is not easy, since Buckwalter contrasts Bucer's general self-evaluation as 'straightforward and Christocentric' with the difficulties readers can have in following his free-ranging argumentation, apparently strongly biblicist but in fact containing other streams. A picture emerges of a [typically proto-Reformed] synthesis between Gospel, Law, Spirit, Scripture and Church. This is to be enforced top-down institutionally, but tempered with pastoral realism and pragmatism as a concession to human nature and manifest spiritual asymmetry among individuals – hence Bucer's eventual flirtation with the idea of two-tier Christians, the godly and not so godly.

As an experienced editor of Bucer's correspondence, Wolfgang Simon provides in his essay some insights into Bucer's character and personality, something that in face-to-face situations seemed always to have made a persuasive impact. Here we are shown evidence of Bucer as mediator and tactician – not just as opportunist, but also because of deep conviction that differences of opinion in many contexts only conceal a profound common unity. Also included are examples of Bucer as personal helper, as friend, and as family father – in which role Simon finds Bucer's lack of effervescent emotion and his jokingly callous humour in the face of family deaths as disappointing.

Lastly, Eike Wolgast presents an interesting and valuable piece on a Max Weberian contrast between Bucer's 'conviction ethics' (high-minded morality) and the 'ethics of responsibility' (ethical pragmatism or utilitarianism) of the Strasbourg Protestant statesman and political realist, Jacob Sturm. The contrast related to the public, religio-political sphere, particularly in the context of the crisis for Strasbourg and its Reformation church vis-à-vis the imperial Interim of 1548/49 following Protestant military defeat. Bucer's uncompromising recourse to fundamental principles faced with the prospect of partial restoration of Catholic worship in the city is highlighted. Flexibility and compromise were out of the question – the answer now lay in repentance, regeneration and prayer in order to stay God's punishing hand. Accordingly he rejected what he called 'Christian politicking', that is, human temporizing by the city government. This led to Bucer's dismissal and exile in England. The voice of his

religious conscience prevailed, so that as a conviction-theologian he took a radically life-changing stand.

Anyone interested in Bucer should get hold of this booklet as a very useful update.

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